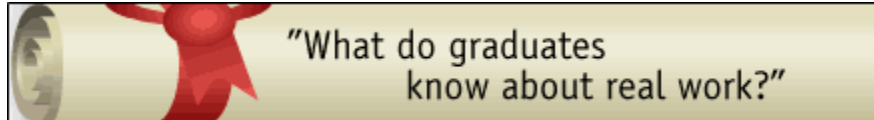


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Guantanamo teenagers return to Afghanistan

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KABUL (Reuters) - Three Afghan teenagers, released by the United States from its military camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have been reunited with their families, officials say.

The detention of the three, who at 13 to 15 years old were the only youths among 660 suspected Taliban and al Qaeda militants being held without charge as "enemy combatants" at the U.S. naval base, drew severe criticism from human rights groups.

The boys were handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross on Thursday, which organised transportation so they could rejoin their families, the officials said.

They were captured in Afghanistan by the U.S. military on suspicion of supporting the radical Taliban regime toppled by U.S.-led forces in 2001 for harbouring Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network.

"They were in good form," General Baba Jan, Kabul's police chief, told Reuters. "I saw them. They said they were kept in a separate cell from the elderly inmates and were allowed to play and have fun."

The United States has told Afghan authorities not to release the boys' names "for fear of reprisals against them", one Afghan official said.

The U.S. military has already freed more than two-dozen Afghans from Guantanamo. Some have complained about ill treatment during their detention.

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